

The Alexander Thomson Society NEWSLETTER

Nº20, January 1998

Gildard on Thomson

Gavin Stamp looks at an early Thomson admirer

ONE OF the most informative and illuminating texts on the achievement of Alexander Thomson is the memorial lecture written by his professional colleague and contemporary, the Glasgow architect Thomas Gildard (1822–1895). Often quoted from, it is difficult to find as a complete text and is therefore published here in its entirety for the first time since 1888.

Comparatively little is known about Gildard. He was a pupil of David Hamilton and his son James in 1838–43 and later worked as an assistant to John Carrick, the City Architect. The only two buildings designed by Gildard – in partnership with his brother-in-law, R.H.M. MacFarlane – cited by David Walker are Belgrave Terrace in Great Western Road, of 1856, and the Britannia Music Hall in Trongate, 1857. Gildard was in the chair when Thomson gave his celebrated lecture to the Glasgow Architectural Society in 1866 which criticised Gilbert Scott's designs for Glasgow University. In addition to his lecture on Thomson, Gildard published his architectural reminiscences, entitled *An Old Glasgow Architect*



Thomson on the Colosseum: "...bad in form, and treated with a degree of rudeness that corresponds well with the unhallowed purpose for which it was built."

on Some Older Ones. Originally a lecture given in 1894 and full of valuable information on Hamilton and many other architects, this was published in the *Proceedings of the Philosophical Society of Glasgow* for 3rd December, 1894, pp.1–27. An annotated copy of this was presented to the Library of the Royal Institute of British Architects by the author in 1895, shortly before his death. A Supplement to this text by Gildard was published in *The Builders' Journal* for 3rd September, 1895, pp.50–51, and 10th September, 1895, p.74.

Gildard's lecture on Thomson exists in three slightly different versions. Two are handwritten manuscripts bound together and preserved in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow. These are the texts from which Gildard delivered his lectures. The first was to the Glasgow Architectural Association on 22nd February, 1887. Gildard then copied out the whole of his text again, making a few changes, for his lecture to the Architectural Section of the

Philosophical Society of Glasgow on 30th January, 1888, which was then printed and published in the *Proceedings of the Philosophical Society of Glasgow*, volume xix, 30th January 1888, pp.1–19. It is from this printed version that the following text is taken, incorporating amendments made by hand by Gildard on the copy preserved in the Mitchell Library, to whom we are indebted for allowing us to see these texts.

This printed version is included in a second bound collection by Gildard in the Mitchell. Entitled *Greek Thomson: His Lectures on Art and Architecture; and some Notices of his Works and Genius*, by Thomas Gildard, it incorporates a handwritten Preface by Gildard; a printed version of the Haldane Lectures with pencil annotations by Thomson himself; obituaries and a leading article from the *British Architect* by Gildard; Gildard's published 'Paper' on Thomson, with annotations and a

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Inside:

**Thomson's Howard
Street warehouse**

Winter Lecture Series

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handwritten Addendum; and then, as an Appendix, various articles and printed illustrations; an account of the Thomson Memorial and the unveiling of his bust in the city's Art Gallery; and a handwritten version of the speech given by Thomson, as President of the Glasgow Institute of Architects, addressing the question, *How is it that there is no modern style of architecture?* at a dinner in 1871 which was subsequently published in the *Glasgow Herald* on 8th April 1871.

Gildard's Preface is given here, followed by the short preamble bound with the 1887 manuscript of the lecture, while his Addendum is printed after the published text. Variations between the 1887 and 1888 manuscript texts are given as notes. Thomas Gildard's comments in his original manuscripts suggest he was diffident

about his own ability to do justice to the unique genius of Thomson, yet today his text seems a most powerful and eloquent analysis of the achievement of an architect of towering stature.

Preface

AT THE time of Mr. Thomson's death, I being Glasgow correspondent of *The British Architect*, it was my duty to write for that journal an "obituary-notice." After it had appeared, the editor asked if I would contribute something further regarding the genius of so eminent an architect – hence the two articles which immediately follow the Lectures.

When I chose "Greek Thomson" as the subject of a paper for being read before

the Architectural Society, I knew very well how unable I was to do it full justice, I however thought that notwithstanding how inadequately it might be dealt with, it was a subject that had a special claim upon the consideration of a Glasgow Architectural Society, a claim that had possibly been unduly delayed. Perhaps the chief service done by this paper is the presenting together of the estimate of Mr. Thomson's genius by such men as Professor Roger Smith, the late Mr. Burges, Mr. Moyr Smith, and the Mr. D. Thomson who writes in *The Architect*. It does not profess to make mention of all his works; and for me to attempt to fully criticise the creative power of an architect who was at once unlike all his predecessors and all his contemporaries, would be presumptuous.

The verses from *The Bailie* at the end of the paper were read, but the Philosophical Society's editor has thought fit to withhold them from further publication.

On the motion of Mr. David Thomson, it was resolved that the paper on "Greek Thomson" be printed in the *Transactions* – probably more on account of the subject than of the author.

Besides the Lectures, the only published work from Mr. Thomson's pen that I know of is a criticism of Sir George Gilbert Scott's design of Glasgow University, a paper read before the Glasgow branch of the Architectural Institute of Scotland. Of this I had two copies; I lent, and lost them, otherwise one would have had a place in this little volume.¹

When his brother George returned from Africa, [*see *The British Architect* article immediately following the Lectures.] there was a proposal to publish some of the principal of Mr. Thomson's buildings; several meetings of architects and others were held, a relative, a clergyman, wrote a brilliant eulogy of Thomson's genius, and Mr. George offered two-hundred pounds as a guarantee against loss, but somehow this proposal was not carried into effect. A building in Bath Street, and its details, are illustrated in *The Building News*,² the



Garnkirk Fireclay Company vases illustrated in *The Art-Journal Illustrated Catalogue of the 1851 Exhibition*, where they are attributed to "Messrs Ferguson, Miller & Co, of Neathfield, Glasgow".

South-side Park church, and a design for a church at Lenzie, are shewn in *The British Architect*,³ Holmwood, and other villas, are delineated in Messrs. Blackie's book;⁴ the Garnkirk vase is engraved in the Illustrated Catalogue of the 1851 Exhibition;⁵ and several designs in cast-iron work appear in the catalogue of the Saracen Foundry.

Shortly after Mr. Thomson's death, a number of his professional brethren and other friends subscribed a sum of money to be expended on a public memorial. This took the form of a marble bust by Mr. Mossman; there was however a considerable surplus, and this has been so invested as to afford once in three years a sum of between sixty and seventy pounds. The purpose to which this is applied is a perpetual Thomson monument in a prize given for certain prescribed studies in classical architecture. Mr. Mossman's bust is an excellent likeness, the well-nigh classic features of its subject lending themselves favourably to sculpture, and Mr. Thomson's old and intimate friend wrought *con amore*. It was placed, with some little ceremony, in the Corporation Galleries, and given into the keeping, as trustees, of the Lord-Provost, Magistrates, and Town-Councillors of the city.

The paper read before the Architectural Society was on "Greek Thomson," Greek being the style of architecture with which Mr. Thomson's fame is most closely associated, but, as Mr. Moyr Smith says, "he was acquainted more or less with all styles." In some of his works in Italian, for instance, he shews the same fertility of invention and the same purity of detail that he does in Greek – the great style in the use of which he, at least in his own time, was wholly unrivalled.

Thomas Gildard
133, Berkeley Street, Glasgow
June, 1888

Preamble to 1887 lecture:

MR CHAIRMAN and other Gentlemen, I intended to have spoken on, not, as the syllabus has it, "the Genius of Alexander," but of "Greek Thomson," but having found this genius too high for my apprehension, I shall confine this lecture chiefly to some general remarks on the style in which Mr. Thomson became to eminent, and a brief review of some of his more distinguished works.

upon the old-fashioned British public, and classical architecture, if "scotch'd, not kill'd," to some degree accordingly reasserted itself. And perhaps, moreover, a comfort-loving people that had found sweet content about its head in the round soft contours of the Italian style did not take kindly to the sharp-pointed forms of the Gothic, or it may be that the sharp-pointed forms did not take kindly to a comfort-loving people; perhaps, also, some who were satisfied that Gothic was, of all styles, the most suitable for church buildings, did not find it that in which they could most enjoyably "take their ease in their inn." In a word, it was not easy to supplant by even the genius of a Pugin, the easy elegance to which we had been so long accustomed in a pre-eminently domestic style, which lent itself equally well to the designing of a palace for a prince, or a town-house for a merchant.

Sir Walter Scott having made the Gothic dry bones live, it is possible that the genius of Byron reflected anew the light that had shone from the glory of ancient Athens, that not only the poetry wafted to us from the Mediterranean, but also the personal engagement in the interest of Greek liberty, diffused around the "Antiquities" of Stuart and Revett a wider circle than that of the mere architectural student and classical virtuoso.⁸ With us thence may have issued, the situation so favouring it, the noble endeavour to accomplish for the Scottish Metropolis the title of the "Modern Athens." Thomson himself said of some early revivers of the supreme classicism, that, "unable to master the style, they became its slaves." Possibly it was deemed –

Too great, too good,
For human nature's daily food" –

"Greek Thomson." By THOMAS GILDARD, Honorary Member of the Glasgow Architectural Association, and one of the Vice-Presidents of the Architectural Section of the Philosophical Society of Glasgow. [Read before the Architectural Section, 30th January, 1888.]

A T SEVERAL periods in the history of the respective kingdoms of Scotland and England one style of architecture has been all but universal. At one time some particular variety of Gothic was generally accepted for almost all buildings, ecclesiastical or domestic; at another a certain modification of Italian prevailed, no less suitable for the purpose of the palace or the cathedral, as in the Whitehall of Jones, and the Saint Paul's of Wren. The volumes of the *Vitruvius Britannicus* show alike in

public and private building how generally this style obtained during the reigns of Anne and the earlier Georges.

It would be curious to inquire why the use of one of these two styles of architecture, so very dissimilar, was at one time so almost universally prevalent, and why at another time was the other; we know that, at least in the latter⁶, there was over other arts and literature the same pervading genius – the same in the "Spectator" Essays, and in Somerset House.

When the poems and novels of Sir Walter Scott aroused a people that had been taking its ease in an elegant classicism, a wide and active interest at once

was taken in everything mediæval – in Gothic architecture, the art of illumination, in heraldry, glass-staining, and blackletter book-printing. Britton, Coney, and others published plans, elevations, sections, and details of almost every old 'pointed' structure in the empire; and Pugin and other enthusiasts, with an equal⁷ industry and ingenuity, showed the fitness of Gothic for every possible purpose. It became, principally in England, the reigning style, and so nearly did it monopolise the illustrations of the professional journals, that an occasional classical design was a surprise and a relief. Besides Sir Walter, however, other authors were operating with new forces

well adapted for temples, as Gothic was for cathedrals, but too inflexibly severe to be readily bent to the purposes of commonplace domesticity, the city tenement, or the suburban lodging; and those who had neither reverence for pointed arches nor enthusiasm for level lintels, who felt no regard towards antiquity, either home or foreign, kept by the style that, transmitted from Wren and Jones and Chambers, had, in its almost universal adaptability, well served successive generations. Others, however, worshipping the rising sun, but not being dazzled by it, designed with clear, although somewhat limited, vision such legitimate and commanding works as

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The Alexander Thomson Society Winter Lecture Series 1998

Want to find out more about Thomson and the world in which he moved?
Then why not come to this year's Winter Lecture series.

**Wednesday, 18th February: Dominic d'Angelo on CIRCLING THOMSON:
his teachers, his family, and the students who followed him**

**Wednesday, 4th March: Sandy Stoddart on BERTEL THORVALDSEN
(1768–1844), the first internationally acclaimed Danish artist and one of
the most successful sculptors of the Neoclassical period**

**Wednesday, 18th March: Gavin Stamp on Neoclassicism: the search for
intellectual and architectural truth**

**All lectures take place in the Bourdon Building Lecture Theatre, Renfrew Street
(at the junction of Scott Street and Renfrew Street) at 7.00pm.**

Lectures are **FREE** to members, £2.00 non-members, £1.00 concessions

the Edinburgh High School and the Royal Institution. Nevertheless, in the Greek there had not been discovered the plasticity that was arrogated for Gothic, and which Italian under the reign of law certainly possessed; and so it was between the freer styles that a freedom-loving people had chiefly to choose when about to build for its nineteenth-century necessities. Then arose what has been called "the battle of the styles," and which, on both sides, was waged with great skill and vigour. Perhaps nothing more inclined the classicists towards victory than the surprising appearance of the Reform and the Travellers' Club-houses by Barry. These, if they showed little invention, displayed such a happy composition of old features, such admirable massing and proportion, and such purity of detail, that they gave to Italian architecture, if not a new life, at least a prolonged one of general regard for elegance and dignity.

It was about the time that this battle was fiercest that Thomson began business. He gave no allegiance to either side, but seemingly of set purpose devoted himself to the problem of throwing the grace and grandeur of Greek genius over the many and complex building-wants of a people much more practical than impressionable. The possibilities of the style were as yet undiscovered; even as a "limited liability" Greek was not generally understood,

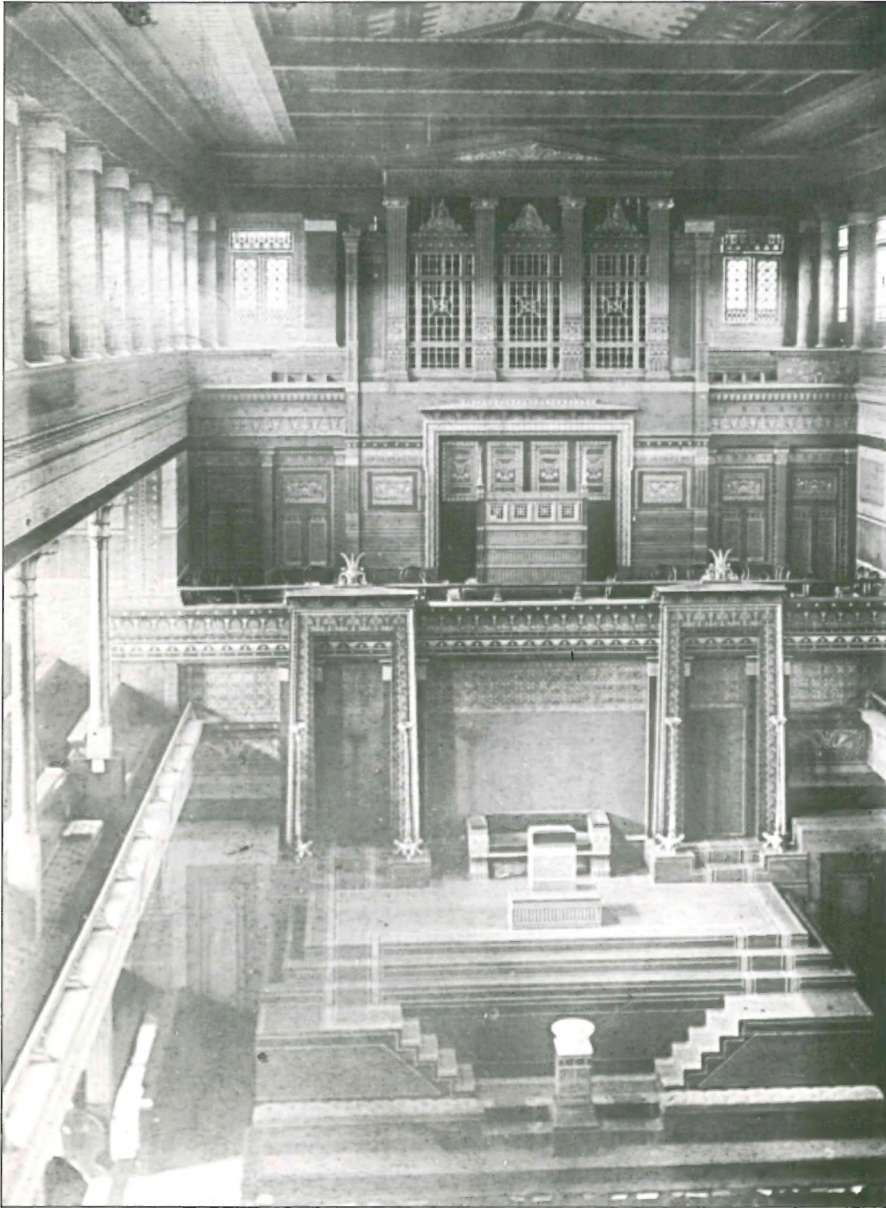
and consequently it was not generally appreciated;⁹ notwithstanding the Byronic associations and the Edinburgh experiments, it enjoyed not the *vox populi*; it was tolerated by the *dilettanti*, and ridiculed by the ignorant. Thomson's genius may be said to have re-created the style – not, however, as it was possible in ancient Greece, because in the times of Pericles and Alcibiades there were no circumstances that could give it opportunity. Where there were no buildings of many windows there could not be a many-windows architecture; and when, in our own country, buildings of many windows became of commercial or other social life a necessity, with these, perhaps, no style of architecture could have less sympathy than the Greek. Thomson's Greek, however, was new, such as was unknown in an age and country that had no tenements or warehouses; nevertheless, it is in the most perfect harmony with the spirit, if not the letter, of the monuments of the Acropolis. Mr. Roger Smith, speaking at the Society of Arts, London, said – "There is one living architect of genius, Mr. Alexander Thomson, who, by his works, is at the present day showing that Greek art, properly used, can be applied with success to the buildings required for ordinary use in Glasgow."

Mr. Smith spoke of Thomson as an "architect of genius." It has been said,

however, that a work of genius must be upon a scale of magnitude, must be universally recognised, and must be of materials that ensure a perpetual duration, and that in Thomson's works there are none of these constituents. This was said to me by a friend when I was speaking to him of the preparation of this paper.

In works of genius material bulk is not necessarily an element. Between material and mental greatness there is an admitted difference. The Roman Colosseum is one of the largest buildings in the world, but in Thomson's own words "the Colosseum is bad in form, and treated with a degree of rudeness that corresponds well with the unhallowed purpose for which it was built." The Greek circular temple, commonly called the "Lantern of Demosthenes," is in material bulk of very little consideration, but in artistic skill it is of the very highest value. Indeed, it is a characteristic of the great Greek works – works the genius in which wholly beyond question – that materially they are comparatively small; the Parthenon of Athens, for instance, as compared with the Colosseum of Rome. There may be more artistic genius in a Greek vase than in a Trajan's column.

Nor is it necessary that to claim for it genius a work must be universally recog-



Gildard on Queen's Park Church: "The scheme of this decoration is as unique, as original, as is what is purely the architecture."

nised. In that admirable criticism which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Hamlet, he makes the Prince say there is that which "though it may make the unskilful laugh, yet cannot but make the judicious grieve – the censure of which one must, in your allowance, outweigh a whole theatre of others;" and he causes the hero of Agincourt to say to the daughter of King Charles of France, "We are the makers of manners, Kate." Of nothing is the British public more ignorant than of architecture and sculpture as fine arts. It is probable that a thousand admire the figures in Mrs. Jarley's waxwork for a hundred that can appreciate the sculptured friezes of the Parthenon. There may be genius without any recognition – "Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest." How many works of genius are known only to the few, to the learned, those only who have access to them, and who, from their culture, are capable of judging.

Nor is it a requisite of works of genius that they be of imperishable materials. The Barberini vase is broken, even the great temples of Egypt are in ruins. There are works of genius which perish in the using. No one will deny genius to Garrick and Kemble, nevertheless its material representation – the gesture, the tone, the facial expression – has passed away. The genius of Turner was conspicuous in his colour, "the light that never was on sea or shore," but

"The treach'rous colours the fair art betray,
And all the bright creation fades away."

How few of the works of genius comprise the several elements of greatness of size, universal recognition, and ever-enduring materials. "Tam o' Shanter" is a poem the excellence of which is by everyone acknowledged; but it is of no great

extent, and its duration is imperilled by its being in a language that is becoming obsolete. The Venus of Milo is not a large statue, its excellence is known almost only to artists and art-critics, and the material by which it is expressed is certainly not imperishable. The beauty of the Parthenon is, or at least ought to be, very generally admitted, yet materially this building is neither large nor lasting. Of great architectural works, there are few, I fear, that comply with the conditions enunciated by my friend. Doubtless there are the Pyramids.

We must take Thomson's genius as we find it, and that is chiefly in having re-created a style – re-created it as water exhaled from the pure clear lake returns to the earth refreshing it as new. [*Before the dew of evening fall. – *King John*, Act II, Scene 1]¹⁰ This style is homogeneous, not here a little and there a little, but is within itself complete. A cultured architect visiting Glasgow sees from a distance some building of original composition, yet exquisite proportion, and hastes towards it that he may examine its details. He finds that these are of the aptest congruence with the general design – as if an arboriculturist, seeing from a distance some unusual tree, uncommon in its massing, grouping, and general configuration, found when he came to it, that its bark, its leaves, its flowers, its fruit could belong only to itself, and that they naturally arose from the very disposition that gave to this particular tree its specialty of outline. In this re-creation there is as much genius exercised as in the original devising.¹¹ Shakespeare, in re-creating the story of the conspiracy against Julius Caesar – fitting it for an Elizabethan audience – showed perhaps more genius, so "bettering the instruction," than did Plutarch, from whose "Lives" he derived the information.¹² Thomson imposed upon himself the task of carrying the spirit of Greek art from the temple-crowned Athens to the warehouse-thronged Glasgow; and, notwithstanding that the Greek remains are comparatively few, so conjuring with them that had it been pos-

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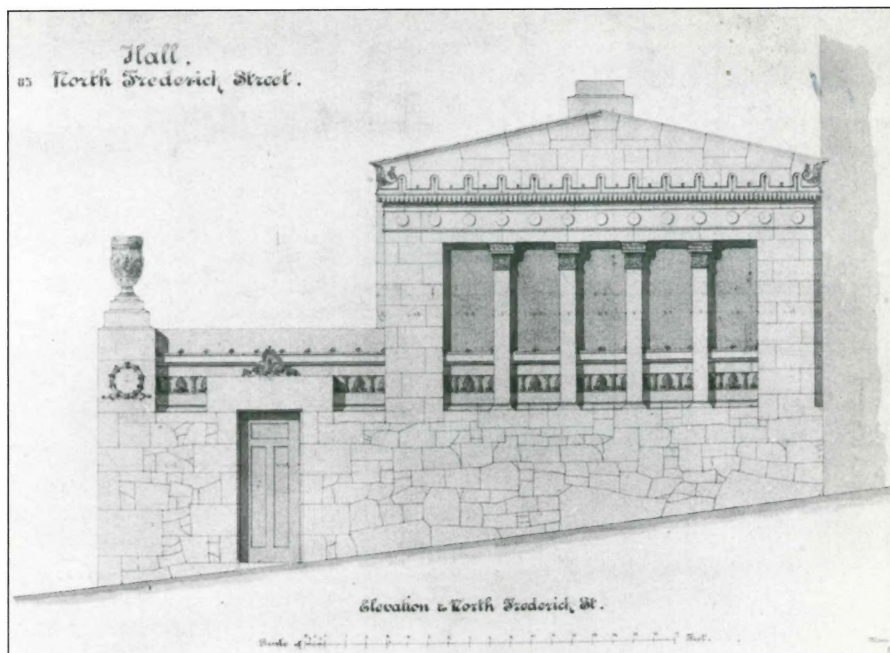
sible for our nineteenth-century architectural necessities to have been the architectural necessities of Greece in the time of Pericles, they would have been to the old Athenians as they are to us by Thomson. As I have said elsewhere [*In *The British Architect*],¹³

"His genius seemed to be less derived from than native to Greece, as if it had breathed its air, and joyed in its sunshine – developing under Helios, rather than 'pushing' in a conservatory – less educated by Stuart and Revett than impelled from such circumstances as gave colour and character to the Athenic life when at its fullest."

As Greek art is the most perfect, so is it the most difficult; it is "the entire and perfect chrysolite," from which, without injury, nothing can be taken, and to which nothing can be added. As is said in a recent work, [*"Culture in Helles"]¹⁴

"it was not a partial or one-sided development that was aimed at by the Greeks, it was harmonious and complete – that of every part in due proportion. Among people regulated by such instincts and principles – insisting upon unity wherever and just so far as there was sufficient homogeneity in the constituent parts to admit of it, and upon the strictest symmetry among those – a building could no longer remain a congeries of independent members; it would become, in the amplest sense of the term, a work of art."

To reduce an art such as this to the alike complex and commonplace wants of our time and country was beset by many and varied difficulties. To satisfactorily combine the Greek integrity of art with the varied wants of business required in invention and in judgement the powers of no ordinary genius. It has been done, and we are familiar with it. "Custom hath made it in us a property of easiness." A new style of elevation for, otherwise, ordinary tenements, as in Eglinton Street,¹⁵ does not now surprise. It has been copied, and its success has stimulated towards the attempting of those styles that do. In Thomson's business life-time there



was among the cultured of the profession something of curiosity to know what was his latest invention, some degree of eagerness to see the facile felicity with which he had modified the ornaments of Pallas to bedeck the robe of Britannia. They expected, and they were certain to find, something new and true – a sculptor's studio as sculptor's studio had never been before; a Pagan temple consecrated to Christian worship, of which it would be difficult to say whether it had less resemblance to the Pagan temples of old or to the hitherto treatment for a similar purpose. He would have been a new man even among the old Greeks.

The studio [above] which Mr. Thomson designed for his old and intimate friend, Mr. Mossman, was one of his first works that attracted the particular attention of other architects as art-critics.¹⁶ In quality of composition, if not also of detail, I do not know if, in any of his subsequent works, he has surpassed it. The site, the corner of two streets, one of which is level, the other having a considerable inclination, is taken advantage of with consummate skill as regards both artistic design and utility. Along the level street the walling is of cyclopean masonry, pierced by a doorway which, from its still being on a level with the surface within, serves the purpose of "bank" loading, and on each side of it, by three openings, having broad dwarf pilasters between them, also on each side of the doorway, the extreme piers being of cyclopean work, part of the general walling. On the inclined street the composition is in four parts: the first, a continuation of the cyclopean wall, with its somewhat hori-

zontal openings and their dwarf pilasters; the second, the gateway, with its piers "growing" from the general walling; the third, the screen between the gateway and the studio proper, with its doorway crowned by a block cornice and acroterion, and having a honeysuckle-and-lotus enrichment extending from each end of this cornice; and the fourth, the studio proper, composed of four pilasters and two extreme piers carrying a block pediment, between the pilasters a dado on a level with, and continuing the honeysuckle-and-lotus enrichment on each side of the door, the whole standing upon a cyclopean basement.

Another early work is the Caledonia Road United Presbyterian Church [opposite]. In this building the portico fortunately faces the south, has considerable depth, stands upon a high and unpierced stylobate, except by a simply dressed door at each extreme, and is flanked at one side by a lofty square tower; in which, on this southern elevation, there are no openings except in nearly the highest stage. The portico, comparatively small, is exquisitely proportioned, and, as the chief feature in the composition, it receives emphasising value from the solid character of the stylobate and from the lower part of tower. Nearly midway on the western face of tower is a boldly-designed window which, when the works of Thomson were few, I looked upon as the grandest individual architectural mere part that I had ever seen either on paper or in execution. It is not a two-light window, but a one-light window divided into two by a pilaster with antae supporting a cornice which serves

as a transom. This pilaster, with ante and cornice within a magnificent architrave, with frieze and a cornice supported by trusses, is characterised no less by great power and beauty than by novelty. On the east the storey standing on a high base of cyclopean masonry, and thereafter corresponding in height and treatment with the stylobate of portico, is relieved by only three great recesses like square niches, dressed with architrave, frieze, trusses, and cornice, similarly to the great window on the west side of the tower; and the upper story is a continuous colonnade of square columns or pilasters. The site has a slightly acute angle; the church is a parallelogram in plan, and the remainder of the area – the side towards the west – is designed as a one-storey lecture-hall, the platform being at the narrow end so that all eyes may converge towards it. The church is lighted only by the windows in the continuous colonnade of the upper storey. The tower finishes square in plan; immediately above the three-light opening on each face there is in the highest stage, which is slightly stepped back, a circular panel for a clock, supported by characteristic scroll ornament, and the apex of the roof is surmounted by a plain two-armed cross. The portico is Ionic. I once asked Mr. Thomson why he had never used the Doric; he told me that he had never had a building whose size was worthy of it. The walling of the tower and of the stylobate is of that alternate high and low coursing – the low courses projecting slightly – so frequent, and applied with such marked and consistent effect in the works of Thomson.

In the larger and better known work, the United Presbyterian Church in Saint Vincent Street, the disposition of the parts is very similar, the Ionic portico resting on a massive stylobate with door at each end, and the tower, unpierced until at considerable height, flanking it. In the stylobate is a series of slightly horizontal windows separated by dwarf pilasters. On the return front, towards Pitt Street, which is on a very considerable inclination, there is a basement of large blocks irregularly jointed, having at its lower end a doorway of door and two windows. The



elevation towards the lane is in some respects perhaps the grandest. The portico is in everywise the same as that towards Saint Vincent Street; it has the immense advantage of looking towards the south, and stands at a considerably greater height – the peculiar treatment of the stylobate, with its doors and windows, being of surpassing power and dignity. Among the especial features of this church are, besides the stylobate, the magnificent walling and doorway of the basement in Pitt Street, the windows and dwarf pilasters in the stylobate towards Saint Vincent Street, and of course, each portico, in itself one of those masterpieces that at once induce and require the most careful study. Over all there is the most exquisite detail, exquisite alike in its originality, in its intrinsic beauty, and in its adaptation. This placing of a tower alongside of a portico, retaining for each its individuality and yet uniting them so harmoniously, is so skilfully effected, that in the distance the painter is invited to prepare his canvas, and in the foreground the architect is challenged to the severest criticism; the one finding a picturesqueness of composition that ancient Athens never knew, the other a refinement of detail that it never surpassed.

From a certain point in Bothwell Street the general composition, and more especially that of the tower, caught upon the angle, the Saint Vincent Street Church must, for the classical student, when first

he sees it, possess a singular fascination, this classic associated with picturesque in such unwonted yet aptest harmony; in moonlight, from the foot of Pitt Street, when, looking up to it on the hilltop, he sees, as it were in silhouette outline, the justness of its proportions; when at noon-day from the South-side Park he sees it, as in Turner-esque picture, dominating a series of streets rising above streets like the rock-hewn steps of some Titanic staircase. What a mine of not merely new, but hitherto undreamt-of wealth, what a birth of inventiveness is discovered in this building, in the general design, and in the details alike of the mouldings and the ornament. In all this invention there is nothing importunate, nothing of self-consciousness; in this creation of a new system nothing of disturbance; all is composed and in repose, each is related to each, the dignity to the grace, and the beauty to the power: "It rejoices in, and is completed by law – strongly and sweetly from end to end."

Mr. Thomson once spoke to me of a possibility of the porticos of this church looking to the east and to the west. Both then would have had sunshine on them, and, as the site is the summit of a hill, each in being approached would have been looked up to from a considerable distance.

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Howard Street: what Thomson did next

AROUND 1852, and 'shortly after the first stage of The Knowe, Thomson designed a warehouse at the junction of Howard Street and Dixon Street, Glasgow, for the same client [John Blair, a Glasgow merchant].'

Thus Dr Ronald MacFadzean, on Thomson's designs for a cast-iron warehouse now in the Mitchell Library. Two designs exist, one showing an elevation from Howard Street (*below right*), another from Dixon Street (*below left*).

Although there had been attribution of 1851 to the drawings, McFadzean's assessment, that they date from slightly later, remains the accepted one. He also reports, in *The Life and Work of Alexander Thomson*, a proposal of 1852 which may or may not relate to Thomson's plans:

'It has been arranged to build up the whole of the vacant ground in Howard Street. Plate glass in a unique form will be employed in the Howard Street shops and warehouses to an extent never before adopted in Glasgow.'

What is important for McFadzean about the warehouse that Thomson actually designed around 1853 is that:

the Howard Street site was the first of his entirely Greek-inspired buildings. It consisted of a ground floor occupied by shops and two upper floors which were used for commercial purposes.



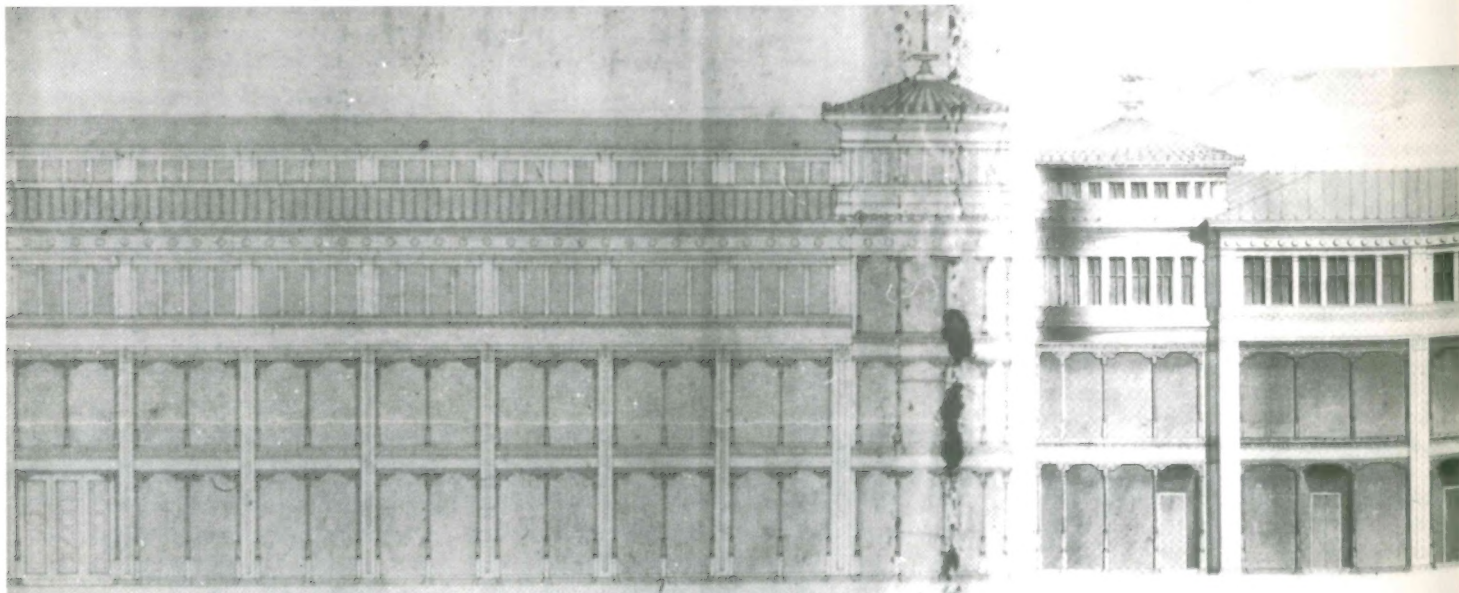
The main elevation to Howard Street was symmetrical with an imposing Erechtheion-type doorway at the centre while the masonry wall above was pierced with windows surrounded by plain architraves. The shop fronts at ground level were formed of timber framing with large sheets of plate glass. Anthemion decorations in relief were inserted in the spandrels between the first and second floor windows towards the ends of the facade.'

The building occupied by general merchants Cooper & Co for many years (they eventually became a subsidiary of Fine Fare, renamed Gateway and now Somerfield) which, in its latest guise, still

occupies the site, although the original building was demolished in 1966.

Photographs of the demolished building are hard to come by: artists and photographers working in St Enoch Square tended to concentrate on the bulk of St Enoch's Hotel, Miller's fantasy subway station, or looked north past Argyle Street up Buchanan Street. If they did look south, any view of the Howard Street/Dixon Street junction was obscured either by the subway station or the now-demolished St Enoch's Church.

Now, however, at least two views have emerged: a partial one in an early 20th century coloured photograph of the square with church intact and, in Robert



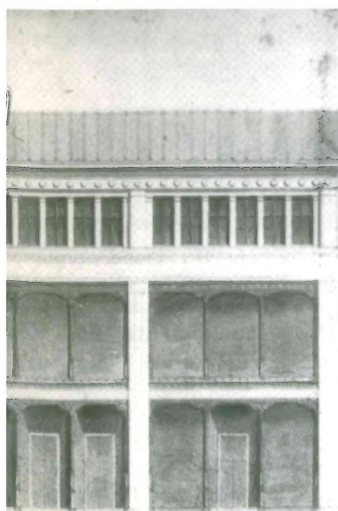
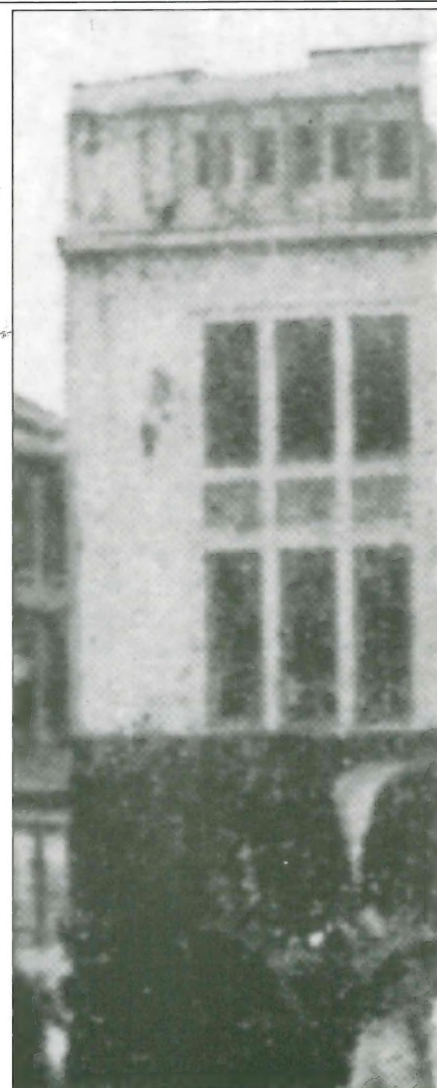


Grievies' 1978 *Glasgow Bus Scene*, a post-war photograph depicting buses and taxis crowding the square where the church once stood clearly shows Thomson's warehouse in the background.

In the earlier photograph, the roofline of the warehouse seems to have been touched out (perhaps it was indistinct), while in the latter, an ironwork balcony at first floor level has been added to hold Cooper's gilded name (a similar method was employed at Cooper's Great Western Road store, although the ironwork appears differently patterned).

Others can better comment on the building's architecture. For myself, one point of interest as regards Thomson's unbuilt warehouse is the contrast in size between the two buildings; Dixon Street always was, and remains, the lesser of the two streets in importance, yet Thomson's Dixon Street elevation seems the more imposing of the two. Given the way in which the Howard Street elevation was obscured by neighbouring buildings, was he trying to provide something of substance to carry the eye down Dixon Street to the river to rest on Peter Nicholson's terrace on the other side of the Clyde?

Dominic d'Angelo





In Thomson, with the severe judgement and high culture of the Greek there was combined the rich and glowing imagination of the Oriental, and perhaps over none of his works has he so thrown an oriental genius as over the United Presbyterian Church [above] near to the South-side Park. [*Since the death of Mr. Thomson the interior of this church has been considerably altered.]¹⁷ I am not going to describe this unique building in detail. The originality of the conception, the felicity of the composition, the beauty of the detail are all characteristic of its author. I have always esteemed this church one of Mr. Thomson's most perfect works. It is singularly unfortunate in its situation – on a dead level, and almost circumscribed by ordinary tenements. Internally it is a surprise even to those not wholly unacquainted with the Thomsonic Greek. The preacher's platform or rostrum is in itself an education – unlike anything that remains to us from the ancients, and yet in the true spirit of Greek of the very highest. Other special features are the open roof, the choir-gallery behind the rostrum, the two tiers of gallery opposite, the artificial lighting by the candelabra on the platform and

the jets along the cornice, and the polychromatic decoration. This decoration is rich and brilliant – it decorates surfaces, but in nowise disturbs an architecture that is independent of it. When it is said that it is from the pencil of Thomson himself, the severity, the delicacy, the power, the grace – in a word, the beauty and the appropriateness of the lines may be readily conjectured. In the colours, or rather in the harmonising of some of the tones, he had the assistance, frankly acknowledged, of the contractor, Mr. Cottier, now of London. The scheme of this decoration is as unique, as original, as is what is purely the architecture. Throughout the church there is not even one cubic inch of plaster, and the natural colour of the wood – yellow pine – contributes its tone towards the general harmony.

The Caledonia Road Church is also decorated from Mr. Thomson's designs, but for some reason, perhaps, more strictly speaking, no reason, the greater opportunity of decorating the Saint Vincent Street Church was denied to him.

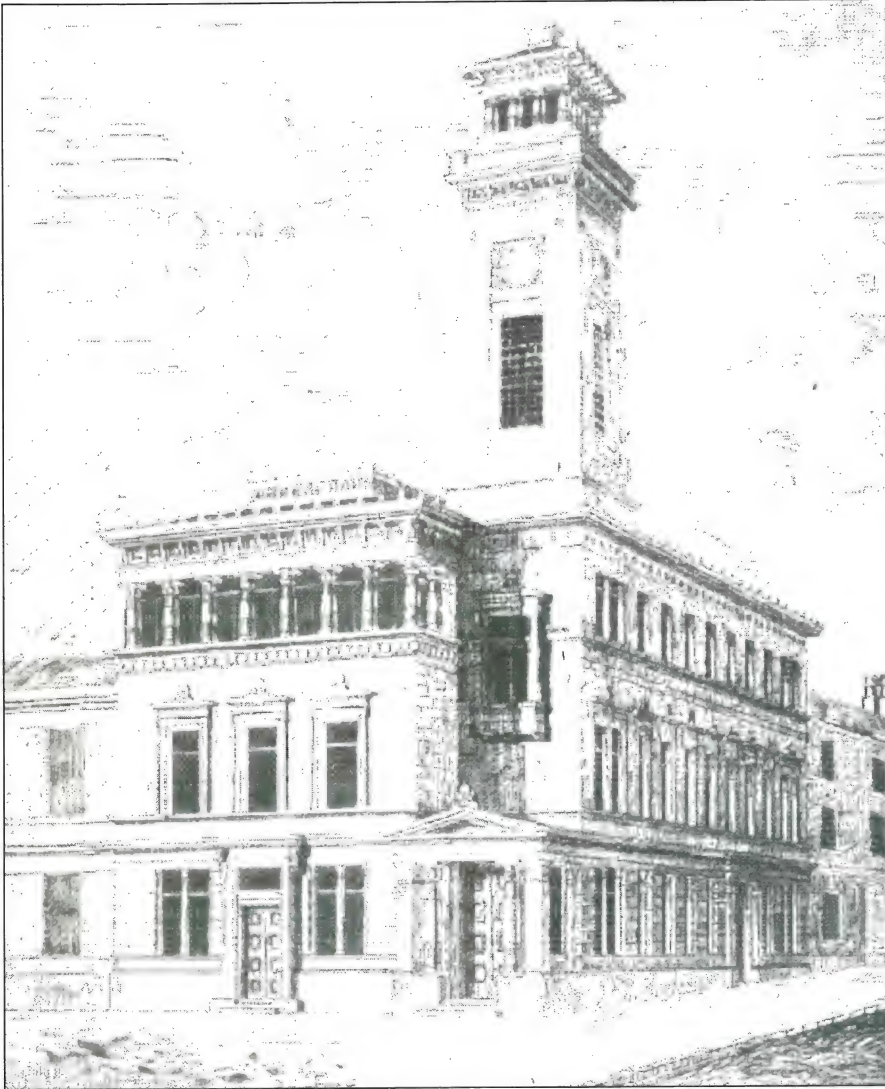
I shall now look briefly at some of Thomson's works designed for other pur-

poses. The great warehouse in Union Street¹⁸ is one that at once presents itself. As nowadays where are shops, there is "no visible means of support" to the superstructure, I need say little of the street storey, further than mention the ingenious manner in which the honeysuckle enrichment is run up the piers and carried along the lintel. Any praise or censure of mine can have little weight in estimating such a genius as Mr. Thomson's –

"Great wits sometimes may gloriously offend,
And rise to faults true critics do not mend,"

and it must be borne in mind how, with us at least, his works have elevated the standard of architectural criticism; yet I must say that the two stories between the street and the uppermost seem weak, as having¹⁹ too much of an effeminate elegance, compared with the grand colonnade which they support. Perhaps the motive of the lowest of them may be found in the more ornate part being as a screen in front of the really supporting

Continued on next page



wall, for, looking from the pavement to the wallhead cornice, it will be seen that the general outline of the section is an ogival curve, the line bending inwards above this apparent screen, and again rolling outwards in the projection of the cornice. I have heard the wallhead characterised as the noblest in Europe, and so far as the professional journals and other means of affording information let us see, this high opinion cannot easily be gainsaid. One means by which this nobility is attained is the unbroken horizontality. How much more mean and petty would have been the effect had this cornice at any intervals been broken and interrupted. No man knew better than Thomson the value of the horizontal line, no man has more powerfully expressed it. It is a dominant element in all his compositions – in this magnificent cornice, as in a sketch for a book-cover. In these restless times of liberty – such liberty as of an escaped lunatic, with its styles and schools of an up-and-down, and an in-and-out, and otherwise knock-knee'd architecture – to the architect who would govern liberty by law, who would have his building an

integer and not an aggregate of fractions, the power of the unbroken horizontal line is one of the principal powers to which he should give respect and homage. Another notable quality in this entablature is its two proportions. It affects "a double debt to pay," "but yet a union in partition" – generally, a nice proportion to the height of the building, and within it, as it were, another entablature as nicely proportioned to the columns that carry it. When the uppermost storey of a building is one of the "orders," a question sometimes arises whether the entablature should be proportioned particularly to the diameter of the columns, or generally to the height of the building. If proportioned according to the order, it seems too light for the whole structure, and if to the whole structure, too heavy for the order. Whether it was by careful study, or by intuitive genius, Thomson has in the happiest manner, combining, yet distinguishing, triumphed over what to many has been a difficulty, both speculative and practical.

The last work of this great architect – that at which he was working within two

days of his death – was a design for a town-hall [above].²⁰ The building, if I remember aright, was three stories high. The uppermost was either the same as the uppermost of the Union Street warehouse, or was a slight modification of it; but the colonnade stood on a wall of banded ashlar; relieved only by three windows; and the effect of such a colonnade upon this high and almost solid wall, with its ever-recurring horizontal lines, was as if with the beauty of Greece was the stateliness of Egypt. In this, although small, subject, in working at which the pencil fell from his hand for ever, are to be seen the chief elements which Thomson always had before him – Order, Power, and Beauty. "Order is heaven's first law," and under its reign, subject to its inexorable rule, he expressed power and beauty, inspiring them with new life, and clothing them with fresh graces.

The Holmwood Villa, made familiar to us by Messrs. Blackie's book [*Villa and Cottage Architecture*], has deprived us of either asking or answering the question, Is an architect an artist? If architecture be poetry in stone-and-lime – a great temple an epic – this exquisite little gem, at once classic and picturesque, is as complete, self-contained, and polished as a sonnet. The connecting of the offices with the villa by the unbroken long line of possibly a garden wall, is an impressive instance of the value of a continuous horizontality. This value may be estimated by supposing the wall away, each building apart, solitary, and unsympathetic. By this supposition it will be seen that this mere wall is one of the most important parts of the composition. By the kindness of Mr. Bowie,²¹ I had an opportunity of seeing the interior. I need scarcely say that it was worthy of the remarkable picture I had been studying outside. Unique beauties and ingenious devices were to be seen everywhere. Of the polychromatic decoration of the walls, ceilings, doors, I might almost say "it beggar'd all description." Mention is made in the "Spectator" of a lady who could not place a patch without spoiling a beauty, and to hang upon these

Continued on next page

walls a mirror or a picture would be not merely "a wasteful and ridiculous excess," but a disturbing impertinence. Thomson's idea was to make a room so perfect, so satisfying, as a work of art, that it was independent of all adventitious means and appliances. "If you have pictures, have a picture gallery." Besides the decoration, much of the furniture, solid and textile, was designed by Mr. Thomson.

Another building which we must look at is Great Western Terrace. You must stand far enough away to focus it in its entirety. The first thing you will likely notice is, that the one-storey-higher "lodgings" of the terrace are not, as is generally the case, the end ones; then in this all-embracing view your attention will be taken to the proportion of the height of the building, to its length – the proportion of the higher lodgings, not only in themselves, but also in their relationship to the length and height of the terrace generally – their relation to it in their special position – and the intervals at which recur in the building throughout those stated features, the several door-pieces. Viewed thus as a whole, I think you have in this terrace as harmonious a work of architectural art as is permitted to be designed by a finite intelligence. It is upon its proportions and its relationship that it almost wholly depends, for so plain is it – "beauty unadorn'd" – that there is neither architrave nor jamb-moulding upon the windows; they are bare openings in the wall, but then most admirably proportioned not only in themselves, but to the solid spaces between them. Another thing, and one that gives a subtle charm to this building – something rather felt than seen – is that the walls have slight inclination as has an Egyptian obelisk. Nevertheless, this grand terrace is not without anomalies. In the fenestration the solids are the uneven number, not the voids; the door-piece of the western three-storey portion is different from that of the eastern, and the eastern has in its centre, instead of an opening a column. All this, however, is so overcome by the mastery of proportion that the windows have to be counted to prove the

fact; and the fact that there is a column instead of an opening in a centre, may again, as it has done already, elude even frequent observation. After having once detected this anomaly, I never saw it again except when I was looking for it. Only a genius of a high order could with so few, and seemingly so simple, elements design a building of such composed unity. The windows have no dressings, but Greek goddesses could afford to appear undressed.

"No meretricious graces to beguile,
No clustering ornaments to clog the
pile;
From ostentation as from weakness
free,
Majestic in its own simplicity."

Some others of Mr. Thomson's buildings I shall little more than mention. Of these are the stable, designed for Mr. Walker at Hillhead²² – an admirable work, the highest art most happily bestowed on what by some might be deemed a mean object, were it not that of the greatest event in the world's history a stable was the birthplace; Westbourne Terrace at Kelvinside; a warehouse at the corner of Argyle and Dunlop Streets, now altered; Messrs. Blackie's premises in Stanhope Street; the little Terrace near Pollokshields, in which was his own house; a warehouse in Sauchiehall Street, in which may be seen the germ of the grand colonnade in Union Street; a warehouse in Gordon Street, in which may be seen a development from a building in Bath Street; Walmer Crescent, Paisley Road; villas at Langside;²³ and many tenements of ordinary dwellings – ordinary, were it not that they show the same fine sense of proportion, the same care in detail, as do his buildings designed for even the highest purpose.²⁴ In this we can look for, among other motives, a conscientious duty, the duty of doing not merely what is good enough, but what is best, the duty of throwing the joy of beauty over our every-day and most familiar surroundings. There are one or two alterations or additions which I would not willingly pass over, such as the great door-piece in Saint Vincent Place, for which, because of necessary changes, has lately

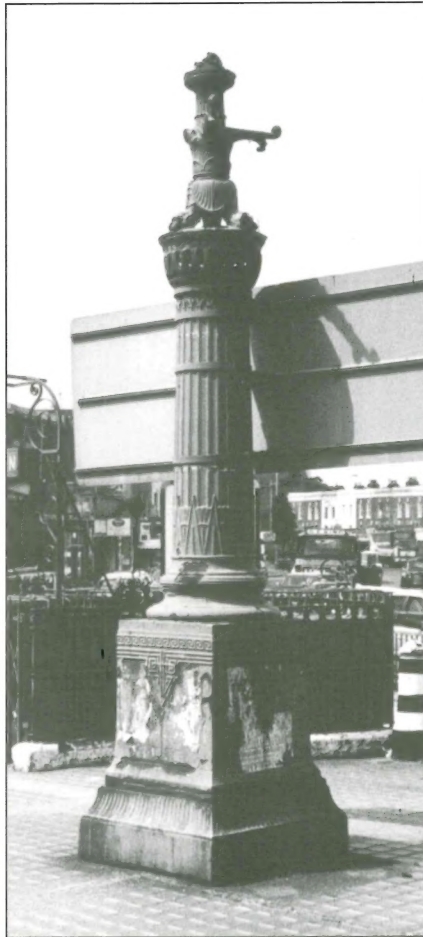
been substituted the finely proportioned and detailed column-porch by Campbell Douglas & Sellars, and the front of Messrs. Frame's counting house in Royal Bank Place, which, although apt to be overlooked in the hurried business walk, deserves, for at least some specialities, a careful regard.²⁵

Notice has been made of the colonnade in Union Street being developed from a building in Sauchiehall Street, and a warehouse in Gordon Street from a building in Bath Street. This modification of the same general design is to be found in other features of Thomson's buildings – for instance, the depending scroll on each side of the pilasters of the second storey of the Union Street warehouse is seen in wood in a shop front in Buchanan Street,²⁶ and in iron on the warehouse at corner of Argyle and Dunlop Streets. There is also a peculiarity – difficult to describe – shown in both the Gordon and Bath Street buildings, a sort of growing from the walling of "detached" pilasters – the root, so to speak, of the pilasters being between the dressings of the windows which are seemingly imposed upon the general surface. It is not easy to account for an architect of such rare inventive powers reproducing the same idea, although varied in its details; it is not easy for us, but doubtless with him there was reasonableness and satisfaction. In Gordon Street a menacing difficulty has been most ingeniously met and overcome. The series of windows beneath the pilasters, instead of being continued so as to embrace in it the walling beneath the two extreme pilasters at each end, is stayed, and for windows are substituted a sort of square niches, features of interest in their treatment, and contributing breadth and repose where there was an opportunity for weakness. This building as the property of Thomson and his brother, and it need scarcely be said that it would engage the usual care; nevertheless, since their deaths, presumptuous ignorance has endeavoured to "improve" it by adding a shop-cornice, a cornice that, with its trusses, bears *prima facie* evidence to anyone that its relationship with the original design is that of the poor and

the unwelcome. The building was designed without a shop-cornice, and why? For the simple reason that a shop-cornice was wholly foreign to the purpose of the architect.

We have seen that polychromatic decoration engaged the attention of this architect. It was part of his system – his scheme of a new Greek. His system was based upon principles, and he demonstrated that these principles were universally applicable. Hence, we see in the same style candelabra, vases, obelisks, and other monuments, cast-iron balustrading, furniture, &c.. Some of these candelabra, such as we see in Union Street, and at the church at the South-side Park, possess great originality of design, a happy combination of strength of outline with delicacy, yet vigour of detail. The Union Street candelabrum is a tripod on a pedestal [right], the tripod and the pedestal each complete in itself and in its relationship to the other – ‘So with two seeming bodies but one heart.’²⁷ Of vases, there is the magnificent one in fireclay, designed for the London Exhibition of 1851, and of which you may see copies in the windows of the Garnkirk Warehouse in Buchanan Street.²⁸ It will command your immediate regard by its originality and power. The late George Mossman, in fine sympathy with the architect, enriched it with a sculptured procession.

Thomson’s monuments are characterised by great breadth of treatment, dignity, and repose. There is one in Sighthill Cemetery, on the northern side of the great avenue, which is a rare example of what a monument ought to be – suggestive, solemn, integral, and yet not in its severity without the play of composition.²⁹ An obelisk is an object of which it might be thought that the lines are fixed and unalterable. But even to the obelisk Thomson gave a fresh charm; where it was unimposing in size, he gave to it an interest in beauty. One which he designed for the London Exhibition of 1862 derived much of its expression from the elegance of its entasis, independently of the ornament with which it was



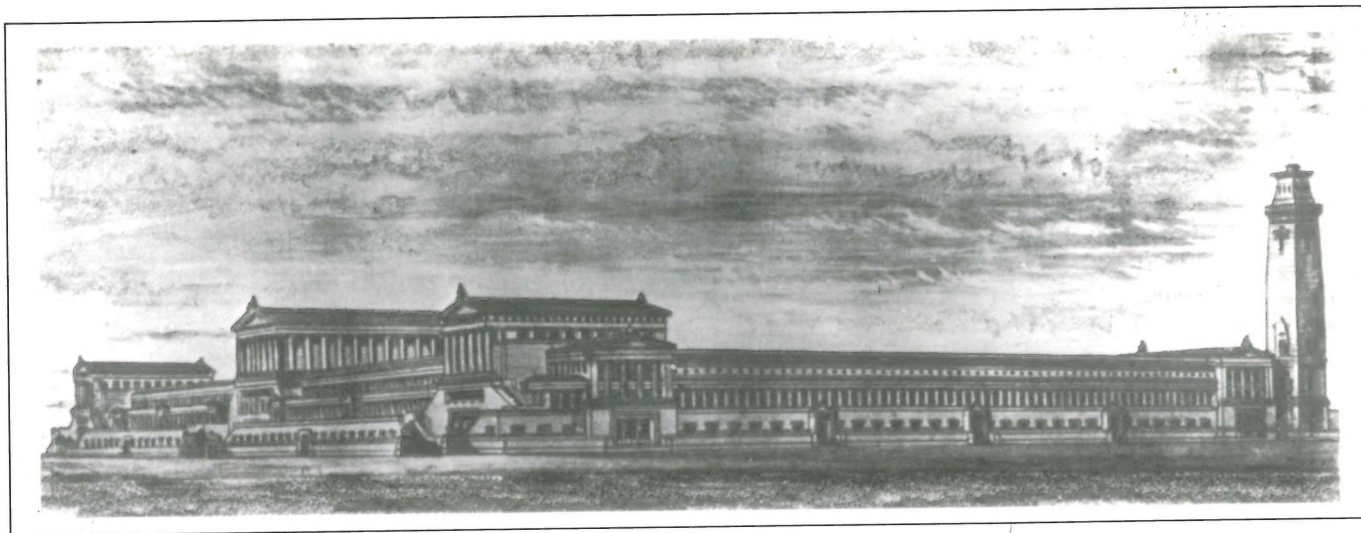
enriched. His cast-iron balustrading is, like all else that came from his pencil, distinguished by novelty, power, and grace. I may mention the balustrade in the staircase of Mr. Blackie’s house, Great Western Terrace,³⁰ the area railing in Saint Vincent Place, although now it wants its finials, and the railing as a panel in the gate of Holmwood Villa.³¹ It is the same with all the accessories to a fine art architecture. The rising generation is now familiar with trusses, friezes, capitals, &c., that to us older architects came as glad surprise. I have been told that the varied designs by Mr. Thomson of the honeysuckle-and-lotus enrichment would of themselves make a considerable volume. He showed design even in the direction of a flame of gas.

It is obvious that whatever object on which Thomson was employed – large or small, a temple or a footstool – could be subjected to his own mode of treatment. Of the classic honeysuckle which he trained on the doors of warehouses and city dwellings, sprays were to be found on the desk or on the carpet. His system is comprehensive, all-embracing. It bears no evidence of any period of crudeness or immaturity, of a time of growing; it appears at once fully digested and in perfect vigour – as Athene sprang from the

brain of Jupiter, of a full stature and completely armed. The Thomsonic style embraces, I think I may say, the conscientious use of the true elements of art – grouping, massing, light-and-shade, static equipoise, rhythm, relativity of parts to each other and to the whole, beauty and appropriateness of detail, the keenest sense of proportion, and the great power of repose, such repose as of the calm sea reflecting the calm firmament. He had with the rich inventive imagination the twin constituent of genius, the exact and all-governing judgement. Genius sees its own limits. If it has not paced all its perimeter, it knows at least its own diameter. Judgement deters it from seeking, to look into the unknowable. If its range be within a garden of culture, it will not seek to overleap the walls that it may explore the briars and brambles of the wilderness beyond. If it does not, like Phæthon, set the world on fire, it is because judgement deters it from driving the chariot of the sun.

Those who have studied Mr. Thomson’s works must have felt not only the appropriateness in character of the ornamentation, but also the nicety of the degree with which it is proportioned to the general design. It is never obtrusively displayed and made “a feature” of; and, although of inviting interest, alike from its originality and beauty, it is less dwelt upon as an especial or individual part than felt as a pervading and gracious presence in the whole. Many of his surfaces are exceedingly rich; but the ornamentation is almost invariably in very low relief, or incised, never detracting from the breadth of the plane, or disturbing the outline of the moulding. His decoration is as proper to the design – as native to it – as is moss to the rosebud. It is eminently the right thing in the right place, designed not for the structure, far less upon it, but with it, and in it; and in a true architecture, where there is nothing to concern, much less to disguise, fulfilling only its legitimate purpose – expression.

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Some architects put their names on their buildings – Thomson's writes itself.

With all his rare ability, there was nevertheless one important thing which Mr. Thomson wanted – opportunity. As has been said, there is a difference between mental and material greatness, yet genius cannot be so well seen, at least it cannot be so much noticed, in a small building as in a large, in a building for a provincial purpose as in one of an imperial interest. Mr. Thomson, however, made designs for buildings of large dimensions and of national importance. The South Kensington Museum, had it been built from Mr. Thomson's designs [above],³² would have, to say – the least, ranked high among the grandest Greek buildings in Europe; the design for the London Prince Albert Monument showed the colossal bulk with the sublimity of the Egyptian tempered by the subtle proportioning and the refining graces of the Greek.³³

It was wont to be the boast of the Gothic apologists that Gothic was the only style

suited for a Christian church, and that in this style, "as broad and general as the casing air," there was freedom enough for endless variety, while in classic, "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in," there was such restraint that design was restricted to commonplace conventionality and its wearisome repetitions. By Thomson's wide as well as high excursions in inventiveness, by the freshness of his freedom, by the rare dignity, and, it might be said, the sacred character that he has expressed upon his churches, the Gothic boast has been lowered in its tone, if indeed, like "patronage," as Carlyle says of Johnson's letter to Chesterfield, there has not been proclaimed of it that it should be no more. Mr. Thomson had admiration for the genuine old Gothic work, although he had little sympathy with much of the new, and had he been spared, it was his intention to have visited several of the great English cathedrals, one of his objects being study for the continuation of his lectures. Of Thomson, as an art-critic, it is not within the purpose of this paper to speak; suffice it that "his precepts teach but what his works inspire." In his Haldane Academy lectures his pen is as fresh and as forcible as is his pencil on the Saint Vincent Street tower or the Union Street cornice.

I have incidentally given Mr. Roger Smith's estimate of Mr. Thomson's genius. The late Mr. Burges said at a meeting of the London Architectural Association –

"Let me ask you to devote some time to the drawings of Mr. Thomson of Glasgow. They represent buildings in Greek architecture, but certainly the best modern Greek architecture it has ever been my lot to see;"³⁴

and Mr. Moyr Smith, than whom few are more intimately acquainted with Greek art, wrote in *The Building News* in 1875³⁵ –

"If a man has the head-power he can use a style and adapt it to himself; if not, he adapts himself to the style. From materials supplied by a far less promising and far less tractable style than the English, Mr. Thomson of Glasgow was able to produce perfect specimens of civic and domestic architecture, which were at the same time perfect as specimens of advanced Greek, which is rather extraordinary, as everybody thought that Greek was perfected a couple of thousand years ago. Mr. Thomson's life and practice, it is true, were different from that of many of our architects. He was acquainted more or less with all styles, and selected Greek as the basis of his future work; he mastered the style, was thoroughly imbued with the Greek feeling, and gathering kindred riches from sources unknown to or overlooked by the later Greeks the style advanced in flexibleness and fulness of design under his hands. His steady progress must have amply repaid him for the sacrifices he made, and the consciousness of reviving and carrying out a style till it reached the splendid culmination shown in the Union Street building and Saint Vincent Street Church, was, rightly considered, a reward greater than has been vouchsafed to any other architect of this century."³⁶

An appreciative criticism by a Mr. D. Thomson – not, I understand, the worthy member of this Society – appeared in *The Architect* of 19th November, 1886 –

"In the works of the late Mr. Alexander Thomson we have a fine series of designs of a character so

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unique and excellent as to excite our wonder at the fertility of his inventive faculties and our admiration at the beauty, richness, and vigour of his handling. In all of them he set himself to adapt the principles of Greek art to modern requirements, without any pedantic borrowing of their features. Indeed, it is quite surprising how seldom we find in his works the orders reproduced, with their details strictly conforming to the ancient remains. He more frequently originates some form of column and capital designed to meet the special requirements he had to deal with, or to conform to the character of the impression he wished the building to convey; but where he has used the orders they are appropriately placed, finely proportioned and detailed, with carefully-adjusted relief, the wall-space behind being kept subdued in one, with no disturbing objects in it to mar the repose and quiet dignity of the design. The multiplicity and the variety of the details and forms he introduced into his works, and the singular grace and unity of effect he maintained throughout, are deserving of our most careful consideration, showing, as they do that to adopt a style does not necessarily imply that only those marked features and peculiarities of detail and combinations which are found in the original works are to be reproduced, but that new forms and details may freely be employed, provided we have still enough to maintain the spirit and essential qualities of the style. Of none of his designs can it be said that they are very like the old world a term of praise we often hear applied to the works of our best men of mediæval proclivities; but, whilst they differ from the works of the Greeks as distinctly as the nature of our requirements do from theirs, they agree with them in the adaptation of forms to the purposes they subserve – the grouping of the parts into forms in which the horizontal lines predominate, the clear marking of the voids, the precision of the distribution, and the graceful adjustment of light and shade, with

strength and placidity as a general expression. Only by the adoption of such principles as these can building be raised into a fine art. His churches in Saint Vincent Street and Caledonia Road, Glasgow, are in his best manner, while the various warehouses and other street buildings by his hand are all marked by the same elegance and refinement of detail, and display the abundance of his resources in design, and his power of impressing, on them his own ideal perception of art."

Addendum

[I forgot to include in the Paper the following extract from an Address by Professor Roger T. Smith to the Leeds Society of Architects. In an Architectural Society in, I think, the north of England, a high tribute was paid to Thomson's genius; but unfortunately I forget when and where I read it. – T.G.]

"Greek" Thomson, as the eminent Glasgow architect was sometimes called, was a man whom I only had the opportunity to know through his works and by corresponding with him, but his buildings are so remarkable that his name seems to call for mention. He believed in the superiority of Greek architecture to every other style; he held the faith that a Greek Renaissance was as practicable as the Roman Renaissance with which we are all familiar, and he devoted his life to a practical demonstration of the soundness of this belief, for he erected in an Anglo-Greek style a large number of important buildings, the bulk of which are in Glasgow; and he suffered, I have been told, both from a loss of commissions and from opposition, on account of his sturdy adherence to the lines he had laid down. He has, however, enriched Glasgow with some public buildings of the most delicate refinement, joined to vigour and originality. No one can pretend that his works are not thoroughly modern; no one can for a moment hesitate to admit that the feeling which animates them is quite Greek. They differ widely from the néo-Grec of France, and yet in many points they recall it. Few architects or critics will admire the whole

of them; some may not admire every part of them, and yet few will fail to admit that they are works of genius, that they are eminently successful, and that they include Renaissance work as beautiful as any city in Europe can show."

Notes

1. published in *Proceedings of the Glasgow Architectural Society*, 1865-67, and in *The Builder*, 19th May 1866.
2. the Cairney Building, in *Building News*, 31st May 1872.
3. *The British Architect*, 19th February 1875, and see Sam McKinstry in *Newsletter* N°10, May 1994.
4. i.e., *Villa and Cottage Architecture*, 1868 &c.
5. Art Union catalogue, *The Industry of All Nations*, 1851.
6. "later" in 1887 MS.
7. "alike" in 1887 MS.
8. the 1887 MS here continues: "but Byron's poetry, also the personal engagement in the interests of Greek liberty, may have given a more general regard towards some of the special characteristics of the great Classical republic."
9. the 1887 MS here: "it was certainly unpopular –" instead of "experiments... notwithstanding"
10. handwritten addition to printed text.
11. the 1887 MS here continues: "We know that grain has been re-created into wheat; and Shakespeare..."
12. the 1887 MS here continues: "The Greek remains are comparatively few, and few of them indeed had much sympathy with our commonplace age and matter of fact country. Thomson imposed..."
13. printed footnote: *British Architect*, 16th April 1875.
14. printed footnote: this book or article remains obscure.
15. Queen's Park Terrace, demolished.
16. on the corner of Cathedral Street and North Frederick Street, since demolished – see *Newsletter* N°8, October 1993, and Alexander Stoddart, 'Mossman's Studio' in *Newsletter* N°9, February 1994.

17. handwritten note on printed text. The *Queen's Park East United Free Church Glasgow Jubilee Book 1867-1917*, 1918, states that the organ was installed in and the hall built to the rear of the church in 1880; and according to Graham Law in the *Architectural Review*, May 1954, the alterations were carried out by Thomson's former assistant, Alexander Skirving.
18. i.e., Egyptian Halls.
19. "with" instead of "as having" in 1887 MS.
20. "for Hawick" – deleted – in 1887 MS at this point. In *Newsletter* N°4, June 1992, Brian Edwards argued that the design – represented by a perspective drawing in the Mitchell Library – was for Annan Town Hall.
21. probably Campbell Tait Bowie, the leading Glasgow house-painter – see Ian Gow in Stamp & McKinstry, 'Greek' Thomson, 1994, p.163.
22. in Smith Street – now Otago Street – Hillhead: demolished – illustrated in Ronald McFadzean, *The Life and Work of Alexander Thomson*, 1979.
23. i.e., Westbourne Terrace, Hyndland Street; Buck's Head Building, Argyle Street; Blackie's Printing Works: demolished – illus-

trated in McFadzean, op. cit.; Moray Place, Strathbungo; Grecian Buildings, Sauchiehall Street; Grosvenor Building, Gordon Street (altered); Walmer Crescent; and the Double Villa, Mansionhouse Road.

24. the 1887 MS here reads: "And when we find workshops receiving a similar share of study, we can look for the motive only as a conscientious duty..."
25. both since destroyed, apparently unrecorded; the lower part of N°s 31-39 St Vincent Place was designed by Campbell, Douglas & Stevenson, 1870-73.
26. possibly the Garnkirk Warehouse on the corner of Sauchiehall Street, no longer extant: see below.
27. this refers presumably to the six cast-iron lamp-standards in front of Egyptian Halls, of which two other casts survive in New Cross, London – see Gavin Stamp. 'Greek T in London' in *Newsletter* N°8, October 1993; Gildard's reference suggests that they were not removed from Union Street in 1871, as sometimes stated.
28. properly the Garnkirk Urn – see *Newsletter* N°10, May 1994, & N°11, October 1994.
29. the tomb of William Provan, now mutilated – see Stamp & McKinstry, op. cit.
30. N°7, Great Western Terrace.
31. these panels – visible in the perspective in Villa and Cottage Architecture – survive and will be incorporated in new gates.
32. the 1887 MS here reads: "would have been the grandest Greek building in Europe." Both the South Kensington design and that for the Albert Memorial are illustrated in both McFadzean and Stamp & McKinstry, op. cit.
33. in the 1887 MS the following paragraph about the Gothic does not appear; instead the text reads: "One brief extract from his Lectures to the Haldane Academy will give you some idea of Mr. Thomson's power as a critic – 'his precepts teach but what his words inspire.'"
- "There is one very important purpose which Art really serves, but which has not received that attention... [from Haldane Lecture I, 1874, pp.10-11] ... and to learn of what they tend."
- 34 *Building News*, 31st May 1867; *The Builder*, 1st June 1867.

35 *Building News*, 16th April 1875, reprinted in Smith's *Ornamental Interiors, Ancient and Modern*, 1887.

36 in the 1887 MS, this final paragraph quoting D. Thomson does not appear; instead, the concluding text reads:

"Shortly after Thomson's death these In Memoriam lines appeared in *The Baillie*.

"Quite over-canopied with lush woodbine" –

In Greece. Now this fair city throned by the West

The "honeysuckle" claims in classic pure outline

With all that's beauteous else by Attic art expressed.

The subtle curve; nice play of light and shade

The long majestic sweep of horizontal line; Grandeur and grace reposing – not display'd,

Express'd not on, but in the true yet new design.

The Grecian grace and majesty combin'd That give our streets an architecture thus unique,

Own a creative, cultured, highly chasten'd mind,

A Thomson's genius – equal to the grandest Greek."

An astronomer places his observatory upon a high place when he searches for spots upon the surface of the sun, or sweeps over the sky for an unwonted comet; I have only looked through ordinary spectacles upon a genius no less brilliant than it is rare, and whose very intensity may have perhaps obscured my vision."

These verses were repeated in Gildard's other volume, together with: "And in the same journal these lines appeared on the occasion of the unveiling of Mossman's magnificent bust –

As Thomson's cultur'd genius, ripe as rare

Greek grace and grandeur could conceive, express

As own might Athens in her prime – we seek

In kindred art with noblest school compare,

And give the great Greek architect no less Than marble sculptur'd – as of Greek by Greek."

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